Although we packed our umbrellas we hardly needed them! Dublin, in particular Trinity College, was a splendid location for the European Conference, close to a friendly, busy shopping area, magnificent and esoteric bookshops, picturesque rows of Georgian terraces and sites rich in literary and art history.

My husband, John, and I were fortunate to stay in the old Temple Bar area opposite Dublin Castle, and only a five-minute stroll to Trinity College. Approximately 350 delegates attended from Ireland, Israel, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Kuwait, Singapore, Switzerland, Spain, the UK, Scotland, the Philippines, Iceland, Greece, Japan, Northern Ireland, New Zealand, the USA and of course a small contingent from Australia.

The social events during the conference were stimulating and atmospheric. They included: a State Reception at Dublin Castle where we were welcomed by the Minister for Health; a reception at City Hall with the Lord Mayor of Dublin, followed by an Irish pub evening at Johnnie Fox’s Pub (c.1798) in the mountains near Dublin with traditional Irish pub music; and a gala dinner at Trinity College (c.1716) at which the college choir sang haunting Gaelic songs by candle-light under the high vaulted ceiling of the Palladian style dining hall.

The program for partners included a trip to Newgrange to experience the stunning archaeological site of a Neolithic burial tomb and a trip to the Wicklow Mountains out of Dublin. John carried out a selfless and scientific sampling of Guinness around Dublin with a few willing helpers!

As the general theme was Managing Health Information in the 21st Century, presentations and workshops dealt with the electronic health record, the art of health records, managing health information, e-health, clinical coding and classification, consent issues and business process engineering.

Sponsors and exhibitors included Oracle, Accen-ture, HP, NHS Information Authority, Mentec, IMS and File Vision.

A paper of particular interest to me, entitled Electronic patient records – an opportunity to re-engineer physician and patient communication, was presented by Professor Charles Safran, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA. The presentation centred on the recently implemented Clinician Support Technology (CST) Baby CareLink project in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) in Boston.

The project was originally funded by the National Library of Medicine and is now commercially supported by CST. It provides an environment where parents, although remote from the NICU, can communicate with the caregivers and actively participate in decisions regarding their premature baby’s care. The parents monitor their baby from home, schedule visits and find medication information relevant to the child’s condition. They may view the medical record. Parents can also view their baby via daily updated digital pictures – there is a secure website dedicated to each baby. Perhaps even more importantly, from the privacy of their own home, at any time of the day or night, they may research some 700 newborn-related subject areas stored in the massive database containing clinical content and resources such as baby care and safety reference material. The project has reduced the average length of stay for the premature baby in this unit and also resulted in a 75% reduction in reports of quality-of-care problems. Of course it requires a computer in the home! There are social issues here for discussion regarding computer access and literacy. However, I was impressed by the opportunity to link the family/patient and the physician using technology including an electronic patient record.

The proceedings of the conference were published in the Irish Journal of Medical Science (2002).

Many thanks should be extended to Willem Hogboon, President IFHRO, Gerard O’Dwyer, President IHSMI, members of the Scientific Program Committee and the local organising committee for an entertaining and stimulating conference. We should look forward to the next international meeting in Washington, USA, 9–14 October 2004.

I did enjoy the opportunity to network with international colleagues. After the congress, like other international visitors, we drove around Ireland, particularly enchanted by the spectacular and wild Atlantic west coast, and poured over the Stone Age passage tombs, ring forts, castles and Georgian architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries.

References

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Many photos of the conference are available for viewing on the IFHRO website:
www.ifhro.org/news.htm (2003 Issue 1)